

# Senior Investigator Award Winner:

Dr. Wolfgang Linden

Written by Natasha Gallant, M.A. (Regina)



Dr. Wolfgang Linden is a Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia who has devoted his long career to advancing research in the areas of Health Psychology and Behavioural Medicine, with a focus on psychological contributors and adjustment to cancer and cardiovascular disease. With well over 100 publications and nearly 12,000 citations, Dr. Linden has certainly enjoyed an enormously successful career in academia. Most recently, his significant contributions to the discipline of Health Psychology were recognised with the CPA Health Section Senior Investigator Award. In light of this honor, I recently had the pleasure of speaking with Dr. Linden about what this award means to him and what has contributed to his long, successful career. Here's what he had to say.

## What drew you to a career in health psychology?

My father had a mild heart attack when he was only 67 years old and that, at around the same time, he had a chance to get involved in research involving cardiac rehabilitation: All of a sudden, there was something that I could find personally meaningful. The thing about health, of course, is

that it's an incredibly easy subject to connect to. Health issues are relevant to everybody. There's really no exception. There will be members of your family who go through a cancer experience. There's just a thousand connecting points with this topic and with your own personal life.

**"Say 'yes' to opportunities...  
You can't just wait for  
opportunity to knock on your  
door. You've got to get out  
there." -Dr. Linden**

## How has health psychology evolved since you began your career?

There's no question that the consciousness or the awareness of it has gone way up because there's a lot of really good research. You can also look at which diseases people develop and which diseases they die from as a function of prosperity. If you go back, people died in large numbers as children from infectious diseases because we didn't have antibiotics. So, we get older and older and now you get the diseases that are age-specific like heart disease and, if they survive that, they have a reasonable chance to develop cancer. The key challenge is that, because of these changes, we have way more people living with chronic diseases, and so you want to reduce their suffering, but also offer them either cures—of which we have very, very few—or at least ways to manage their disease that allows you a decent quality of life and without blowing up the budgets of health care systems.

## What has contributed to your success in a career in academia as a health psychologist?

One of my philosophies of life that is, I think, apparent in all this. And that is, if you want to get somewhere, say "yes" a lot. Say "yes" to opportunities. That applies to everything. I mean, if you were a student in political science or if you were a plumber, it's the same idea. If you want to enjoy life, you need to be willing to engage in something—that could be a psychology career. You need to engage. You can't just wait for opportunity to knock on your door. You've got to get out there and look for things—interesting things—that are around. Say "yes" and play with it for a while. If it turns out to be awful, walk away, change your mind. By trying out all of these things, you find out what's exciting and you meet other people who think like you and function like you. And that's a great joy.

## What does this mean to you to receive the Senior Investigator Award?

In most professions, we learn to live with very little reinforcement; when it does come along, it feels pretty good. It's good that somebody recognizes the things you've done and that they think it's worthwhile to mention it.